



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)



# Behavioral Health is Essential To Health




## Prevention Works

## Treatment is Effective

## People Recover



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# SOAR Overview for PBHCI Grantees

*SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery  
Technical Assistance Initiative*

**Sponsored By:**  
**Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services Administration**  
**U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services**  
**March 2017**



## Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).



## Poll

### SOAR Involvement





## SOAR

- SOAR stands for SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery
- For people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness
- A model for assisting individuals to apply for Social Security disability benefits
- Sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in collaboration with SSA since 2005
- All 50 states currently participate



## SOAR Technical Assistance Center

- SAMHSA funds the SOAR TA Center to support states and communities
- Offers virtual and on-site technical assistance
- SOAR TA Liaisons are responsible for SOAR in multiple states
- Get to know your SOAR TA Liaison
- Reach out for help or answers to questions about any aspect of SOAR



## SOAR TA Center - State Liaisons



<https://soarworks.prainc.com/directory>



## SOAR TA Center Contacts

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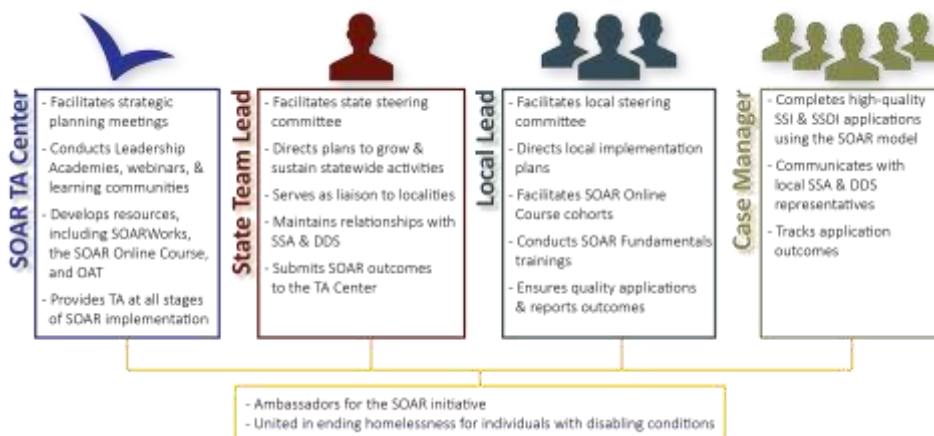
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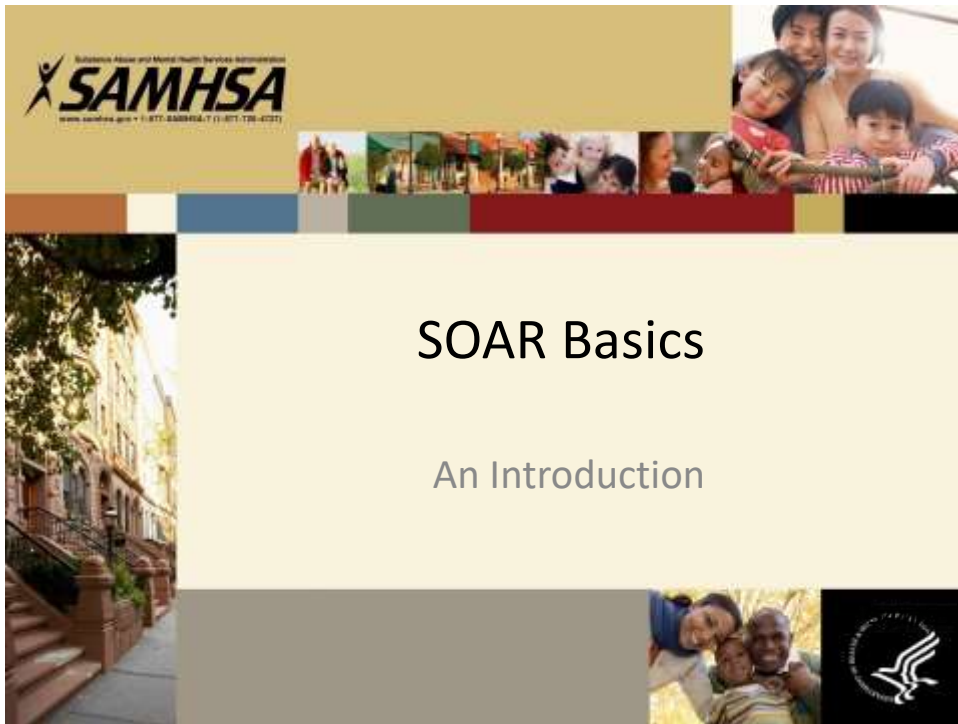
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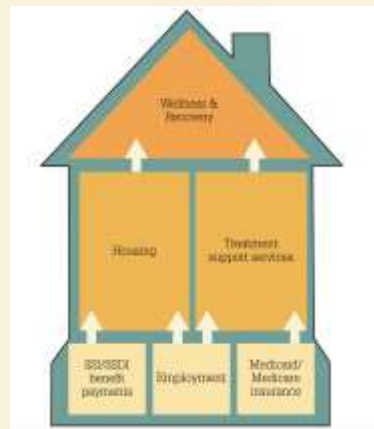
**Deb Stevens, Project Assistant**  
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## Why is SSI/SSDI Important for Individuals?

- Provides access to:
  - Income
  - Housing
  - Health Insurance
  - Treatment
  - Supportive services
- Builds a foundation for recovery:
  - Ending homelessness
  - Decreasing incarcerations and hospitalizations
  - Increasing employment opportunities



## Why is SSI/SSDI Important to Caseworkers and Agencies?

### SOAR Benefits Caseworkers

- Case workers who are SOAR trained are more effective in their work and report increased job satisfaction
- It reduces frustration in navigating the process and provides time to focus on services that enhance quality of life

### SOAR Benefits Agencies

- Health providers see SOAR as a way to increase Medicaid and Medicare revenues for otherwise uncompensated care
- SOAR is a way to diminish the possibility of a return to institutional life among persons who are transitioning from prison or jail or who are being discharged from state psychiatric hospitals



## Why is SSI/SSDI Important for States & Localities?

- People experiencing homelessness are frequent users of expensive uncompensated health care
- Can recoup cost of this care from Medicaid for up to 90 days retroactive to date of SSI eligibility
- States and localities can recoup from SSA the cost of public assistance provided during the application process
- SSI, SSDI and Medicaid bring federal dollars into states, localities and community programs



## SOAR Has Broader Goals

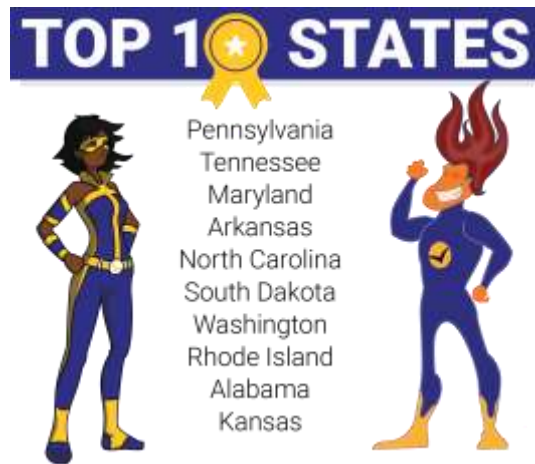


## Changing Lives Since 2005

- **31,356** persons experiencing or at risk for homelessness have been approved on initial application
- **67%** approval rate overall, in an average of **101** days in 2016
- Compares to 10-15 percent for unassisted applications from people who are homeless and 28 percent for all applicants
- Appeals can take a year or more; many people give up and do not appeal
- Estimate that in 2016 alone, SSI/SSDI for the individuals served by SOAR brought over **\$317 million** into the economies of participating states and localities







## SOAR Partners



SSA

- Social Security Administration
- Federal agency that administers SSI/SSDI
- Makes the non-medical decision



DDS

- Disability Determination Services
- State agency under contract to SSA
- Makes the medical/disability determination



Medical

- Medical/Treatment providers
- Assessments/evaluations
- Medical records



You

- SOAR trained case managers are actively involved every step of the process



## SSI & SSDI: The Basics

### Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Needs based; federal benefit rate is \$735 (2017); provides Medicaid in most states

### Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

Amount depends on earnings put into SSA system; Medicare generally provided after 2 years of eligibility



## Definition of Disability

1. Medically Determinable Physical or Mental impairment
  - Illness must either meet or be equivalent to the "listing" criteria used by DDS. Supporting information must be documented in medical records
2. Duration
  - The impairment tied to the illness(es) must have lasted OR be expected to last 12 months or more OR be expected to result in death
3. Functional Information
  - Applicants must demonstrate that significant functional impairment related to the illness(es) exists that impede their ability to work

Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) = \$1,170 (2017)



## The SOAR Way

- Case managers actively assist applicants and develop evidence
- Focuses on the initial application – “Get it right the first time!”
- Avoids appeals whenever possible
- Focuses on documenting the disability
- Successful SOAR states and communities:
  - Form steering groups (including SSA and DDS) that meet regularly to address challenges
  - Provide ongoing support to case managers assisting with applications so that communication and quality are enhanced (e.g., refresher trainings, quality review, support group meetings by phone or in person)



## Critical Components for Success





# SOAR Online Course

## A Quick Overview





## SOAR Online!

- Offers standardized training
- Expands SOAR to new geographic areas and audiences
- Practice application packet requirement limits involvement to those most likely to complete applications
- Allows state and local SOAR leads and trainers to:
  - Coordinate follow-up training on state-specific processes
  - Provide support to persons assisting with applications
  - Ensure high quality and complete applications
  - Track and monitor outcomes



## Overview of the SOAR Online Course

- <http://soarworks.prainc.com>
- 20 hours to complete
- 7 classes (from SOAR 101 to work incentives!)
- Practice case overview
- Submission of the practice case
- Cohort model – why it's important!



## Enrolling in the Online Course

### Register with SOAR Works

[Create new account](#)
[Log in](#)
[Request new password](#)

SOAR Works is a national community of individuals implementing best practices designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI for eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. By joining, you not only access an online curriculum designed to improve your skills, but also a professional community to support you in your ongoing use of the SOAR model.

If you already have an account, log in. If you're having trouble accessing your account, click here.

#### Sign Up

Items with a red asterisk (\*) are required.

E-mail \*

A valid e-mail address. All e-mails from the system will be sent to this address. The e-mail address is not made public and will only be used if you wish to receive a new password or wish to receive certain news or notifications by e-mail.

NOTE: If you enroll in the online curriculum, your e-mail will be shared with the SOAR State Lead from your state.

Confirm E-mail \*

Password \*

Confirm password \*

Provide a password for this new account in both fields.

Password quality

#### SOAR Role(s)

(check all that apply)

☐ I am the SOAR State Team Lead.  
☐ I am a SOAR Local Lead.  
☐ I am an agency administrator.  
☐ I am a case manager or outreach worker.  
☐ I am a dedicated benefits specialist.  
☐ I am a peer specialist.  
☐ I am a data analyst.  
☐ I plan to use this information for my or a family member's application only.  
☐ Other role (just listed above)

My position is funded by:



# About the Course

## Articles & Content



## Practice Case Demonstration



&



# Tracking Outcomes

Got outcomes? Get funding!



## Online Application Tracking (OAT)

<https://soartrack.prainc.com>

- A web-based program that allows case managers to keep track of their outcomes
  - Free
  - Easy to use
  - Accessible from any web browser
  - Nothing to download
- On a secure server
- HIPAA compliant
  - No personal identifying information is collected



## Registration

**OAT WORKS**  
Online Application Tracking

Register for OAT

By clicking Register, you are certifying that you are a case manager or other staff member who is responsible for tracking outcomes for clients. You are also certifying that you are a member of a SAMHSA-funded program. If you are not a member of a SAMHSA-funded program, please contact us at 1-800-458-5231.

Name (Last, First, Middle):

Email:

Password:

Confirm Password:

State:

Agency:

My position is funded by:

☐ SOAR training I have attended:

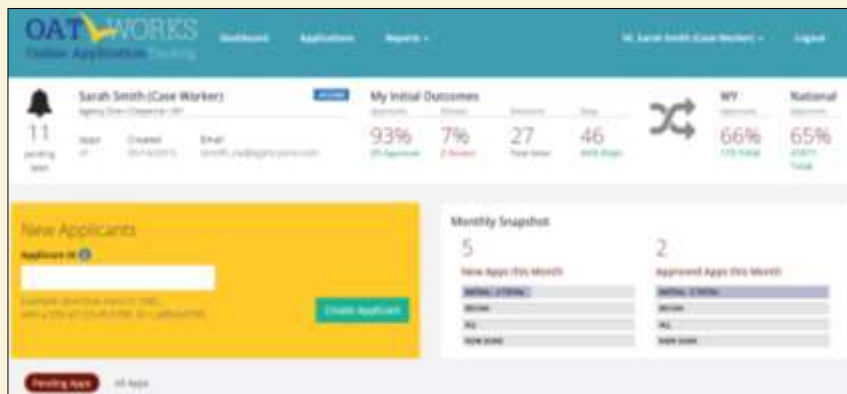


## Outcomes in OAT

- Outcomes for initial applications & appeals
  - Approval rates
  - Time to decision
  - Critical components
- Optional outcomes
  - Housing
  - Employment
  - Medicaid and other public benefit reimbursements



## Case Worker Dashboard





## Example: Summary Report












# Pittsburgh Mercy SOAR:

## Best Practices and Outcomes

**Shaun M. Kostiuk, MBA**  
 Manager of Client Financial  
 Services





## A Note about Pittsburgh Mercy

- Our roots and heritage go back to 1843 when 7 Sisters of Mercy came to Pittsburgh from Ireland at the request of the Bishop.
- We are a person-centered, population-based human services organization.
  - Outpatient, Residential, **Homeless Outreach**, Crisis, Primary Care, Prevention and much more
- We serve Allegheny County (Pittsburgh, PA)
- We are part of Trinity Health



## Structure of our SOAR Program

- SOAR has been at Pittsburgh Mercy since 7/2015
- 70% of program is funded externally via a contract, 30% is funded internally
- 4 Trained SOAR Staff
  - 3 full-time, dedicated SOAR Specialists
    - Began with 2. Added the 3<sup>rd</sup> in year 2.
  - 1 program manager, part-time is dedicated to SOAR



## Program Specifics

- Program participants must have a mental illness (comorbidity is welcome!)
- We serve adults (18+) in Allegheny County
- We specialize in new applications
  - Currently not accepting appeal level cases
- We do a 'weekly huddle' first thing Monday



## Outcomes

- Figures for 7/1/15 – 6/30/16 (Year One)
  - 367 Total Referrals
  - 73 Applications Submitted
  - 81% Approval Rate
  - 72 Day average time to decision



## Best Practices

- All SOAR specialists are former Service Coordinators/Case Managers
  - All have experience with SPMI
  - All accustomed to doing field work
  - A writing assessment was part of the interview process
- Honest assessment of situation and honest situation with individuals
- Market/Education visits to targeted providers
- Use TA center for quality reviews



## Best Practices

- Access to Physicians
  - Internal prescribers are our best resource
  - Mental Health: O/P psychiatrists, O/P CRNPs
  - Physical Health: Physicians and PAs
- External Physicians
  - Staff are respectfully tenacious
  - Some of available and supportive, some are the opposite
  - 1 Staff had a 20% difference in approvals



## Best Practices

- Medical Records
  - Marketing visits in year 1 to the large providers
    - Wavier of fees
  - Smaller or private providers = great access
    - Look them up, give them a call!
  - Criminal Justice Records
    - County Jail vs. State Institution vs. State Hospital
  - Waiting on records does not delay application



## Money Talks!

- Challenges in discussing outcomes
  - It is a foreign language to some
- **Everyone** understands money, especially funders!
- SOAR can be quantified by financials in addition to approval % & time until decision
- Track back payments, monthly benefits



## Let's Talk About Outcomes

- Situation A:
  - “Our outcomes are great! We have a 72% approval rate and average 78 days until a decision...both exceed the national average!”
- Situation B:
  - “Our outcomes are great! In our first 2 years, over \$1,000,000 in benefits have been paid out to folks we work with that have been approved!”



## Let's Talk About Outcomes

- Situation A and Situation B both apply to Pittsburgh Mercy
- Frame your outcomes appropriate to what is meaningful to your audience



## What do we track?

- Number of Referrals
  - Disposition of all referrals
  - Referral Sources
  - If Closed or Not Eligible, why?
- Timeframes
  - Wait list, length and time
  - Time: Intake to App, App to Decision
- Approval Rates
- Financials – monthly, annual, aggregate
- Staff-Level Outcomes (time, approval %, etc.)



The SAMHSA logo with the text 'Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration' and the website 'www.samhsa.gov' and phone number '(1-877-624-6868)'.

A collage of images showing diverse groups of people, including a family with children, a group of friends, and a person in a wheelchair.

## Question & Answer

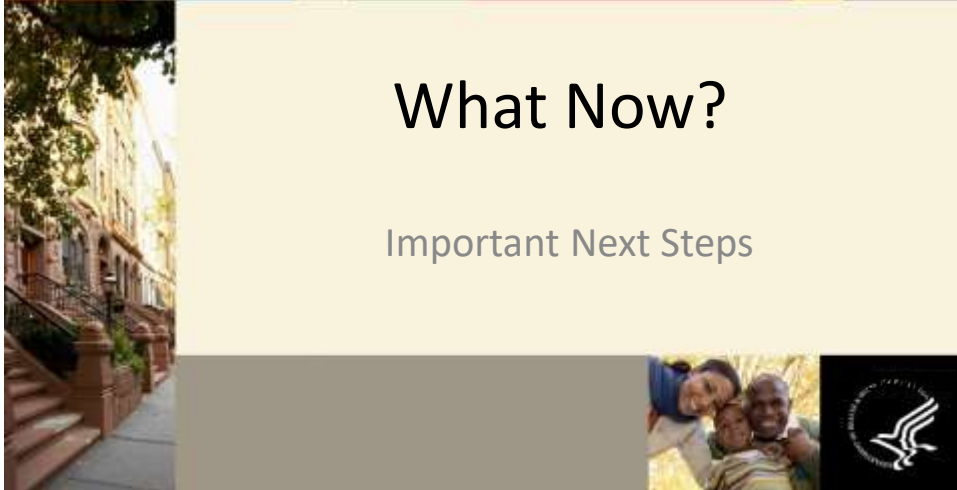
A photograph of a street scene with brick buildings and trees.

A photograph of a family (mother, father, and child) smiling, next to the SAMHSA logo.



# What Now?

Important Next Steps



## Next Steps

- ✓ Learn more about SOAR:  
<https://soarworks.prainc.com>
- ✓ Get in touch with your SOAR TA Center liaison
- ✓ Reach out to your local or state SOAR leads
- ✓ Register for the SOAR Online Course





## Connect with Us!

Visit our website: <https://soarworks.prainc.com>

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